

Saul of Tarsus's Transformation

Pastor Joseph Clark – June 4, 2020

“I died to the law so that I might live for God.”

- Paul Of Tarsus, Galatians 2:19

“But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- Matthew 19:26

Paul of Tarsus was a Hebrew born with the name Saul, in Tarsus in Cilicia, which is modern Turkey. He was a Greek-speaking Jew born during the time of Jesus Christ. He died in Rome, Italy, at or around the age of 65. He was an educated man, who studied in Jerusalem at the school of Gamaliel, one of the most noted rabbis in history. Paul was a member of the Pharisees, a high-ranking religious party of great influence and power amongst the Jewish leadership. Paul was able to quote the Old Testament extensively and had a deep conviction to the Hebrew faith. Paul was tasked with persecuting any Jews who were converting to the Christ movement. After Christ had ascended into Heaven, there was a massive conversion amongst many Jews to become Christians. Paul was assigned to travel from synagogue to synagogue, urging that any conversions be met with corporal punishment. When a mob stoned the first martyr, the Apostle Stephen, for preaching the Gospel, witnesses laid their cloaks at Saul's / Paul's feet and he approved of their stoning Stephen to death.

Paul embarked to the city of Damascus on his way from Jerusalem, with a mandate given to him directly from the Hebrew High Priest, to seek out and arrest Christians and return them to Jerusalem as prisoners for examination and torture, and possibly execution. However, a few days later, Paul himself converted to Christianity and devoted the rest of his life to a highly active and successful ministry as an Apostle of Christ, which placed his own life at risk for the rest of his days. He was imprisoned multiple times, tortured, and eventually executed for being an Apostle. Paul is believed to have written 13 books of the New Testament

and planted 14 churches. Many theologians claim that what Paul did for Christianity was second only to that done by Jesus Himself. So, what happened to Paul? Why would a man who had high status and was known as one of the best Jews and best Pharisees of his generation, and who had demonstrated an extraordinary religious conviction, show up one day and completely change to the super Christian Apostle? Paul wrote and testified frequently that on his way to Damascus, Christ appeared to him in a blinding light as is best witnessed in the following Bible passage:

Acts 9:1-19 New International Version (NIV)

Saul's Conversion

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to Your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is My chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. End of passage.

It could be argued that Paul had a change of heart due to regret or guilt over the people whom he was prosecuting, but do you really think that he would spend the rest of his days endangering his life and working exhaustively for Christ if he did not actually experienced this?

The Holy Spirit tells us in the word:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139: 23-24)

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, (Psalm 103:2-4)

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5)

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, (Acts 3:19)

Paul's intense conviction for God did not change. It was fueled and impassioned that much more as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. His talents, his education, his relationships, and connections, made him an incredible asset for Christ's ministry. How many of us have seen that our strengths and gifts have been capitalized on for the good of God's kingdom? When the Lord has us anointed, it becomes obvious to us. Up until that point we can be oblivious. Here are some examples of this:

"No one is forced to convert. Our weapon is the prayer, the spreading of spirit of love, brotherhood and tolerance." – Omar (Last name anonymous), former Syrian Muslim who lived under the ISIS regime and has now converted to Christianity.

"I began reading the Bible to disprove the Christian faith I was learning both to admire and despise. I cannot begin to describe my feelings when I first read the New Testament texts. I saw myself in many of the parables and felt as if the Bible had been written especially for me." – Bobby Jindal, former Hindu who converted to Christianity.

"I thank God for His patience with me and willingness to accept me after all the terrible things I had done." - Danny McIlhiney, former satanic cult member and Satan worshipper.

"I lived a very crazy life, I did some horrible things in my life that I know it's only by the grace of God and His mercy that I'm alive and free," – Former street gang leader of the "Latin Syndicate" who converted to Christian street minister.

Let us rejoice in these conversions and those who are saved by Jesus Christ taking on their sins and his sacrifice on the Cross as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Praise be to God for the miraculous conversions, redemptions, and justifications, which take place each and every day. The Lord give us the free will and choice to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. God has a plan for us. He is aware of our every talent, gift, skill, and capability, and He may permit us to suffer and for the enemy to take hold temporarily, as this hones

our arsenal of life experience which can benefit discipleship or ministry once we are called by The Holy Spirit.

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